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ABSTRACT

Developed at Tarrant County Junior College (TCJC) Northeast Campus (Texas), this paper presents and discusses materials and activities for teaching foreign language conversation classes. Introductory comments describe TCJC's Department of Foreign Languages, new curricular emphases on the development of oral skills, the nature of the college's conversation courses, and the structure of the foreign language. Next, basic guidelines for conversation classes are presented, including: (1) content must be provided as the basis for conversation; (2) pre-class preparation is expected of students; (3) the instructor must organize the anticipated direction of class conversation and find or create materials to supply vocabulary for the discussion topic; and (4) the instructor should be open to language that communicates, regardless of grammatical errors; student opinions and ideas; and controversy among students. The next sections explain the use of various techniques, including "one-liners" as conversation stimuli; checklists, questionnaires, surveys and opinionnaires, which provide key vocabulary and give students an opportunity to think through their opinions; and paired situation cards. Appendices include a series of 11 documents in French or Spanish, which call for student responses and pre-class preparation, upon which class discussions can be based. (LAL)

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TECHNIQUES AND MATERIALS FOR CONVERSATION IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Techniques and Materials for Conversation in the Foreign Language Classroom

(This paper is based on a presentation made at the Third Annual Conference of the Southwest Conference on Language Teaching in Phoenix, Arizona, February 15, 1986. The authors and presenters are Jane Harper, Chair, Humanities Division, and Madeleine G. Lively, Acting Chair, Department of Foreign Languages and Instructor in French, at Tarrant County Junior College Northeast Campus.)

The current interest in oral proficiency testing based on the ACTFL Guidelines has led to a new emphasis on the development of oral skills in the classroom. Faculty at every level of instruction are attempting to develop effective activities and supportive materials that will encourage students to speak.

The conversation classes used as the model for this paper are taught at Tarrant County Junior College Northeast Campus, a suburban campus of about

10,000 students of a two-year community college district in the metropolitan area of Fort Worth, Texas. TCJC is an open-door institution which attracts students with a variety of academic backgrounds. Most students enter the college with limited foreign language experience and preparation.

The Department of Foreign Languages on Northeast Campus offers courses in French, German, Spanish, and English for Speakers of Other Languages. Of the 2000 enrollments in foreign language courses during the spring semester, 1986, approximately 700 are in ESOL, 600 are in Spanish, 500 are in French, and 200 are in German.

The development of oral skills is considered a major goal in the department. In each language four to six levels of conversation classes are offered.

Conversation, as defined in the curriculum, is not a study of grammar and structure; rather, it is the expression of ideas and opinions. Therefore, conversation classes are not appropriate for true

beginners who do not have sufficient language skills to express themselves in discussions. Generally, students take their first conversation course during their third semester of language study as a one-hour elective in addition to their regular sequence course. They may enroll for four sequential semesters of conversation as part of their development of oral skills.

In addition to this four-course sequence are two other conversation programs. One is a regular offering of conversation classes for teachers of each language. These classes, which meet for fifteen hours each semester, grant advanced academic training by the Texas Education Agency toward advancement on the career ladder for public school teachers. The other special program is for area high school students in their second or third year of language study. These classes, which also meet one evening a week throughout each semester, help secondary school students maintain their oral skills while studying

literature in their advanced high school courses and prepare for university advanced placement exams.

The specific materials and activities suggested are not limited in use to courses labeled as conversation. They may be successfully utilized also in the teaching of oral skills in a four-skill program. Neither are they limited to the higher education setting. Rather, they are just as appropriate for the secondary school population as for college students.

BASIC GUIDELINES

Several basic guidelines should be followed to insure conversation class success.

1. Content is required as a basis for conversation, a source of ideas and opinions. Students do not simply sit around and talk about random topics.
2. Pre-class preparation is expected of students. Usually they have a reading

assignment which supplies vocabulary that will be needed for ease in class participation.

3. The instructor must meticulously organize the anticipated direction for the class conversation to follow. For example, with unobtrusive guidance the teacher can gently lead the discussion toward current events related to the reading.
4. The instructor should find or create supportive materials that will supply the essential vocabulary for the discussion topic. Students feel free to talk when they have some security in appropriate basic terminology.
5. Visual materials can effectively and quickly supply meaning for new vocabulary, can stimulate thought, and can hold and direct student attention, thereby greatly influencing the direction of the discussion.

6. Language that communicates is acceptable, regardless of grammatical errors. Only errors that create false communication are corrected.
7. The instructor is always open to student ideas and opinions, even though they may differ from his own.
8. Controversy among students is accepted and even encouraged since disagreement makes people want to talk.
9. In spite of carefully organized materials, the instructor remains flexible in the classroom interaction. When people express ideas and feelings, the conversation can take some very unexpected routes.

Success in a conversation class may be defined as a setting in which students are willing to talk. Specific activities and materials which encourage student participation can be in a variety of forms.

USE OF ONE-LINERS AS CONVERSATION STIMULUS

A stimulus for oral participation can very effectively be provided by so- called "one-liners," often used as a class warm-up activity. These are slides that have been made from thought-provoking pictures, usually taken from magazines. As each slide is flashed on the screen, class members provide spontaneous comments, either by speaking directly to a person in the picture or by assuming the role of that person. (No description of the scene is generally allowed unless specifically sought for other instructional purposes.) The more provocative the picture, the more stimulating it is for conversation. Comical or ironic situations, often found in advertisements, work very nicely. Trimming the picture to irregular shapes in order to avoid written text does not seem to hinder its effectiveness.

Additional activities can be gleaned from the same one-liner slides, such as exercises to reinforce specific grammatical skills needed for effective

communication. For example, descriptions in the past might be requested as an exercise in the use of the imperfect tense. Seeking reports of what has happened, predictions, or what one would do in given situations can provide activities using past, future, and conditional tenses.

CHECKLISTS, QUESTIONNAIRES, SURVEYS, OPINIONNAIRES

Various materials asking for student response are generally based on the reading topic and are assigned to be completed prior to class. Hence, they provide key vocabulary that can be internalized for use with ease during class discussion. In addition, they provide the student with an opportunity to think through his opinions on relevant issues so that he can readily participate in the conversation.

Such materials may be produced in a variety of formats.

1. Checklists simply ask the student to mark the items listed that indicate his responses to a given question; for example, which places of interest he has visited in Paris, or which ones he would visit given certain conditions, i.e., bad weather, no money, etc. (Refer to documents #1, #2, and #3 for samples.)
2. Rating scales ask for student responses based on different qualities or priorities.
   a. Desirability can be sought in a rating scale in which the student indicates choices ranging from a little to a lot, as in how much he would fear leaving different items in his home to the care of someone else while he goes on vacation. (Refer to document #4.)

b. Frequency rating scales can range from never to always, such as how often one might use different modes of transportation. (See document #5.)

c. A preference scale ranging from not at all to certainly allows the student to indicate his priorities on a given topic, such as which Teletel services he would prefer if he could subscribe to it here in the U.S. (Refer to document #6.)

d. Attitudes may be rated from positive to negative on a scale of 1 to 5, such as to what degree a student finds different careers boring or interesting or poorly-or well-remunerated. (See document #7.)

3. A multiple-choice questionnaire provides the student with a wide range of choices of completions to statements based on the topic, such as how he might spend his vacation. (See document #8.)

4. Open-ended statements provide the student with an opportunity to furnish his own choice of response and recall of vocabulary, such as which profession he might select given certain requirements. (Refer to document #9.)

5. A forced-choice questionnaire allows the student to make choices within the guidelines of a provided list. A sample question might be: "In my choice of profession, it is more important to me to have _____ that to have _____." (See document #10.)

PAIRED SITUATION CARDS

The use of paired situation cards as a stimulus for classroom conversation is particularly effective as a review activity. The instructor prepares multiple sets of two cards each on topics previously studied by the class. Topics for beginning and

intermediate classes might center on typical interactions in such ordinary places as the post office, a pharmacy, a restaurant, a movie theatre, a bookstore, an administrative office on campus, a bakery, a department store, a dorm room, etc. The topics are numbered. For each topic two instruction cards are designed, A and B, one for each side of the interaction, with specific instructions as to the role of the participant, his goals, and necessary details, such as his financial condition and his time requirements.

Students draw one card each, thereby creating random conversation partners in class each time. Students holding 1A and 1B are asked to read silently through their cards, then to interact spontaneously before the class, using the information provided. Their performance is followed by 2A and 2B, then 3A and 3B, and each pair in succession. The situations can be defined so as to provide approximately two to three minutes of dialogue. (See document #11 for a sample pair of cards.)

The first few times that paired cards are used in class, the situations should probably be rather straight-forward. However, as students become familiar and comfortable with the technique, minor problems inserted into the situations make the dialogues more interesting and realistic. For example, discount tickets may not be available for the movie today; the restaurant may be out of the desired dessert; seats may cost more than expected at the theatre or on a train; the schedule may have changed since the last printing; a preferred color or needed size may be unavailable; etc. Students must then think through unanticipated situations and make decisions and choices, resulting in realistic, everyday conversation for normal problem solving.

Cards written in the target language provide many needed vocabulary items. The use of cards in English is a more difficult activity, since students must come up with all necessary vocabulary without the help of instructions containing specific vocabulary appropriate for the situation.

CONCLUSION

Frequent and consistent use of activities and materials that stimulate participation in conversation activities in foreign language classes will enliven these classes. Students will perceive the activities as realistic and meaningful. With a supportive, encouraging attitude on the part of the instructor, students can enhance their oral communication skills and gain confidence in their ability to communicate. In such an environment a foreign language program should flourish.

DOCUMENT 1

1. Quels monuments, parcs, musées, etcetera, à Paris avez-vous visités? Indiquez-les avec un "X".

_____ la Tour Eiffel
_____ l'Arc de Triomphe
_____ l'Avenue des Champs-Elysées
_____ l'Opéra
_____ le Louvre
_____ la Place de la Concorde
_____ la cathédrale de Notre-Dame
_____ les jardins de Tuileries
_____ la Madeleine
_____ le Sacré-Coeur
_____ la Place du Tertre
_____ la Cimetière de Montmartre
_____ la Place Pigalle
_____ le Centre Pompidou
_____ l'Hôtel des Invalides
_____ le Panthéon
_____ la Sorbonne
_____ le Palais de Justice
_____ la Sainte Chapelle
_____ le Forum
_____ la cimetière de Père-Lachaise
_____ le Jeu de Paume
_____ le musée de Marmatton
_____ le Marché aux Puces
_____ le Moulin Rouge
_____ les Folies Bergères
_____ le Lido
_____ le Crazy Horse
_____ la Tour Montparnasse
_____ le Café de la Paix
_____ Harry's New York Bar
_____ les Galeries Lafayette
_____ Au Printemps
_____ les Trois Quartiers
_____ la Samaritaine

2. Si on n'a que trois jours à Paris, lesquels sont indispensables à un tourist à son premier voyage? Indiquez-les avec un deuxième "X".

3. Indiquez avec un troisième "X" les 5 lieux que vous considérez comme vos préférés.

4. Auquel iriez-vous . . . ?

. . . quand il fait beau? _____
. . . quand il pleut? _____
. . . quand il fait chaud? _____
. . . de bonne heure? _____
. . . après le dîner? _____
. . . quand vous êtes heureux? _____
. . . quand vous êtes triste? _____
. . . quand vous êtes fatiqué? _____
. . . tout seul? _____
. . . dans un groupe? _____
. . . sans argent? _____
. . . avec beaucoup d'argent? _____
. . . quand vous avez faim? _____

DOCUMENT 2

1. ¿Es vivir en el Metroplex bastante agradable o bastante desagradable?

   _____ Bastante agradable
   _____ Bastante desagradable

2. Si tuviera la selección, ¿le gustaria permanecer en el Metroplex o vivir en otra parte del mundo?

   _____ Permanecer en el Metroplex
   _____ Vivir otra parte del mundo

3. ¿En cuál región le gustaria vivir?

   _____ En Tejas
   _____ En el sudoeste de los EEUU
   _____ En el oeste de los EEUU
   _____ En el nordeste de los EEUU
   _____ En Europa
   _____ En Asia
   _____ En Africa
   _____ En otras regiones

4. En su opinión, ¿es el Metroplex una región del futuro o, al contrario, es una región en declinación?

   _____ Una región del futuro
   _____ Una región en declinactión

DOCUMENT 3

1. Si vous désiriez échanger votre maison pour partir en vacances, qu'est-ce que vous pourriez offrir comme échange?

_____ une grande maison
_____ une petite maison
_____ un appartement
_____ deux ou plus salles de bains
_____ des appareils électroménagers
_____ deux voitures
_____ une voiture
_____ une motocyclette
_____ une bicyclette
_____ une piscine privée
_____ une piscine partagée avec des autres
_____ un jacuzzi
_____ une femme de ménage
_____ un barbecue
_____ un téléviseur
_____ deux ou plus téléviseurs
_____ une cheminée intérieure
_____ un bâteau
_____ un bâteau à voile
_____ une résidence secondaire
_____ un club de gymnase
_____ un club de tennis
_____ des billets aux concerts d'orchestre
_____ des billets au ballet
_____ des billets à l'opéra
_____ des billets aux matches de sport
_____ un bar bien équipé à la maison
_____ un chien
_____ un chat
_____ un cheval
_____ des voisins agréables
_____ d'autres membres de la famille près de la maison
_____ un lac
_____ des montagnes

DOCUMENT 4

¿De qué tendría Ud. miedo en dejar a una familia extranjera vivir en su casa por un mes?

	Muy poco	Un poco	Mucho
- que muriera el perro	_____	_____	_____
- que se rompiera el cristal	_____	_____	_____
- que se hiciera chocar el coche	_____	_____	_____
- que fumaran en la casa	_____	_____	_____
- que se olvidara de echar al correo las fracturas	_____	_____	_____
- que no cuidaran de la piscina	_____	_____	_____
- que no cerraran con llave las puertas	_____	_____	_____
- que perdieran las llaves	_____	_____	_____
- que a la familia invitada no le gustaran los vecinos	_____	_____	_____
- que a los vecinos no les gustara la familia invitada	_____	_____	_____
- que se destruyeran los muebles o las alfombras	_____	_____	_____
- que se rompieran los aparatos eléctricos	_____	_____	_____

DOCUMENT 5

1. Vous désirez faire un voyage. Où trouvez-vous votre inspiration de choix de lieu?

	Jamais	Rarement	Quelquefois	Souvent	Toujours
Des amis	1	2	3	4	5
La famille	1	2	3	4	5
Un agent de voyage	1	2	3	4	5
La publicité	1	2	3	4	5
Un professeur	1	2	3	4	5
Le cinéma	1	2	3	4	5
La télévision	1	2	3	4	5
Un guide	1	2	3	4	5
La lecture générale	1	2	3	4	5
Autre	1	2	3	4	5

2. Il y a des considerations quand vous choisissez des vacances. De quelle importance sont . . . ?

	Pas du tout	Peu	Assez	Considérable	Beaucoup
L'argent	1	2	3	4	5
Le temps	1	2	3	4	5
La santé	1	2	3	4	5
Votre famille	1	2	3	4	5
Vos camarades	1	2	3	4	5

3. Quelle mode de transport aimez-vous?

	Pas du tout	Peu	Assez	Considérable	Beaucoup
Avion	1	2	3	4	5
Train	1	2	3	4	5
Voiture	1	2	3	4	5
Autocar	1	2	3	4	5
Motocyclette	1	2	3	4	5
Bicyclette	1	2	3	4	5
Taxi	1	2	3	4	5
Pied	1	2	3	4	5
Auto-stop	1	2	3	4	5

4. Qu'est-ce que vous préférez en vacances? Soulignez votre préférence.

- être tout seul ou être entouré d'amis
- de la repose ou beaucoup d'activité
- être paresseux ou être sportif
- un lieu bon marché ou extravagant
- un lieu près de chez vous ou loin de chez vous
- un lieu familier ou un lieu étrange
- des amis ou des étrangers
- peu ou beaucoup de formalité
- rester dans une ville ou changer de lieu constamment
- un lieu privé ou un lieu publique
- du camping ou un hôtel de luxe
- 5 longs weekends ou 15 jours à une fois

5. Où est-ce qu'on peut aller pour trouver ces qualités que vous cherchez?

DOCUMENT 6

1. Si nous avions Télétel aux Etats-Unis, l'acheteriez-vous pour votre foyer?

   _____ jamais
   _____ peut-être s'il ne coûte pas beaucoup
   _____ mais oui, à n'importe quel prix

2. Quels services voudriez-vous?

	pas du tout	peut-être	certainement
-l'heure	1	2	3
-le température	1	2	3
-les horaires des lignes aériennes	1	2	3
-les horaires des chemins de fer	1	2	3
-des jeux	1	2	3
-des journaux (la presse)	1	2	3
-votre compte bancaire	1	2	3
-des informations de la Bourse	1	2	3
-des livres de cuisine	1	2	3
-l'encyclopédie	1	2	3
-la dictionnaire	1	2	3
-les numéros de téléphone de la ville (région)	1	2	3
-les horaires de cours aux universités	1	2	3
-des leçons (math, français, etc)	1	2	3
-de la correspondance avec des autres	1	2	3
-commander vos achats	1	2	3
- au supermarché	1	2	3
- à la pharmacie	1	2	3
- au magasin	1	2	3
-payer vos factures	1	2	3

3. Quels autres services voudriez-vous?

   - _____
   - _____
   - _____
   - _____
   - _____

4. Quels cours est-ce qu'on pourrait suivre à la maison avec Télétel?

	Pas bien		Assez bien		Très bien
- les mathématiques	1	2	3	4	5
- la biologie	1	2	3	4	5
- la chimie	1	2	3	4	5
- la physique	1	2	3	4	5
- le français	1	2	3	4	5
- l'espagnol	1	2	3	4	5
- le latin	1	2	3	4	5
- la littérature	1	2	3	4	5
- l'histoire	1	2	3	4	5
- la psychologie	1	2	3	4	5
- la théorie de musique	1	2	3	4	5
- jouer du piano	1	2	3	4	5
- l'histoire d'art	1	2	3	4	5
- la peinture	1	2	3	4	5
- l'informatique	1	2	3	4	5

5. Quels jobs est-ce qu'on pourrait faire à la maison avec Télétel?

	Pas bien		Assez bien		Très bien
- programmeur	1	2	3	4	5
- vendeur	1	2	3	4	5
- secrétaire	1	2	3	4	5
- professeur	1	2	3	4	5
- médecin	1	2	3	4	5
- infirmière	1	2	3	4	5
- écrivain	1	2	3	4	5
- hôtesse de l'air	1	2	3	4	5
- guardien d'enfants	1	2	3	4	5
- banquier	1	2	3	4	5
- psychiatre	1	2	3	4	5
- journaliste	1	2	3	4	5
- musicien	1	2	3	4	5
- coiffeur	1	2	3	4	5
- pharmacien	1	2	3	4	5
- scientiste	1	2	3	4	5
- bibliothécaire	1	2	3	4	5

DOCUMENT 7

Etre _____, c'est _____.

plombier	chef du personnel
standardiste	hôtesse de l'air
électricien	coiffeur
cuisinier	garçon
peintre	mécanicien
juge	dentiste
infirmier	acteur
journaliste	athlète professionnel
photographe	

	1	2	3	4	5	
enneyeux						passionnant
mal rémunéré						bien rémunéré
inutile						utile
fatigant						excitant
mal regardé						prestigieux
rébarbatif						agréable
sur						incertain

DOCUMENT 8

1. A mon avis, le but des vacances est . . . .

   A. du repas.
   B. une diversion de la vie quotidienne.
   C. du temps en famille.
   D. du temps à me développer.
   E. du temps à gagner plus d'argent.

2. Passer des vacances aux stages intensifs est . .

   A. ridicule.
   B. possible à des autres, s'ils en veulent, mais pas pour moi.
   C. quelque chose à considérer.
   D. une bonne idée.
   E. formidable! J'ai l'intention d'en chercher.

3. Je voudrais passer aux stages chaque année . . .

   A. un weekend.
   B. huit jours.
   C. quinze jours.
   D. trois semaines.
   E. un mois.

4. Si je suivais un stage, j'aurais l'intention de .

   A. trouver de nouveaux amis.
   B. redévelopper un capacité de ma jeunesse.
   C. développer un capacité en friche.
   D. apprendre quelque chose à m'aider au travail.
   E. m'amuser.

5. Je préférais suivre un stage . . . .

A. tout seul parmi des étrangers.
B. avec ma famille.
C. avec un de mes amis.
D. dans un groupe de mes amis.

6. Des stages qui m'intéressent sont de . . . .

_____ musique
_____ art
_____ tennis
_____ artisanat
_____ poterie
_____ tissage
_____ équitation
_____ randonnées
_____ agriculture
_____ mime
_____ danse
_____ théâtre
_____ guitare
_____ photographie
_____ chercher de l'or
_____ aquarelles
_____ golfe
_____ clowns
_____ astronomes
_____ sculpture
_____ peinture
_____ planche à voile
_____ bâteau à voile
_____ informatique
_____ herboristerie
_____ joga
_____ karate
_____ dégustation de vin
_____ haute cuisine
_____ pâtisserie
_____ bridge
_____ natation
_____ danse aérobic
_____ gymnastique
_____ cyclisme
_____ football
_____ autre

DOCUMENT 9

1. Je cherche beaucoup de prestige; je serais heureux comme . . . .

2. Je désire un emploi sûr; je serais heureux comme . . . .

3. Je voudrais une bonne rémunération; je serais heureux comme . . . .

4. Je veux un travail créateur; je serais heureux comme . . . .

5. J'aime la politique; je serais heureux comme . . . .

6. J'ai beaucoup d'énergie; je serais heureux comme . . . .

7. Je préfère passer du temps parmi beaucoup de gens; je serais heureux comme . . . .

8. Je préfère travailler tout seul; je serais heureux comme . . . .

9. Je n'aime pas beaucoup de bruit; je serais heureux comme . . . .

10. J'aime beaucoup les enfants; je serais heureux comme . . . .

11. Je désire voyager beaucoup; je serais heureux comme . . . .

12. Je sais chanter et danser; je serais heureux comme . . . .

13. Je suis beau et en bonne forme; je serais heureux comme . . . .

14. Je voudrais aider aux autres; je serais heureux comme . . . .

15. Je n'aime pas prendre des risques; je serais heureux comme . . . .

16. J'ai le sens des affaires; je serais heureux comme . . . .

17. J'aime beaucoup lire; je serais heureux comme . . . .

18. Je suis confortable devant un groupe; je serais heureux comme . . . .

19. Je cherche beaucoup de responsabilités; je serais heureux comme . . . .

20. Je désire beaucoup de loisirs; je serais heureux comme . . . .

21. J'aime travailler en plein air; je serais heureux comme . . . .

22. Je veux pas de responsabilités; je serais heureux comme . . . .

23. Je désire faire une contribution importante; je serais heureux comme . . .

DOCUMENT 10

Cuando Escojo una Profesión...

.....es más importante para mi de tener...que de tener...

- la seguridad financiera
- una situación interesante
- muchas responsabilidades de confianza
- una oficina privada
- unas horas flexibles
- una situación independiente (sin vigilancia)
- unos viajes interesantes
- el éxito profesional
- un coche social
- una posición prestigiosa
- unos colegas simpáticos
- las vacaciones pagadas

DOCUMENT 11

1-A Vous êtes à la gare.

- Vous désirez aller de Paris à Orléans.
- Vous désirez voyager 2e classe.
- Vous préférez une place "non-fumeurs."
- Vous voulez aller mercredi après 9h00 et avant 12h00.
- Achetez un billet.
- Payez le billet.

1-B Vous êtes à la gare.

- Vous êtes employé au guichet.
- Les billets entre Paris et Orléans coûtent:
  lère classe - 180F
  2e classe - 120F
- Demandez au client s'il préfère lère ou 2e classe.
- Demandez au client s'il préfère "fumeurs" ou "non-fumeurs."
- Vendez un billet.
- Quand votre client paye, donnez-lui la monnaie.

ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges
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